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ABSTRACT

In order to chart a course for the future development of professional librarians, the American Library Association (ALA) sponsored a Congress on Professional Education in 1999 to examine critical issues related to graduate education. Issues centered around university education generally, library and information studies (LIS) education specifically, and the perspective of the profession at large. More than 150 invited delegates were named from a wide variety of professional associations and other groups to ensure diversity of experience and commitment to continuing dialog and change. Recommendations were made to define the scope, content, and values of the profession, to establish and apply standards for accreditation of graduate programs, to enable credentialing and continuing education, to position librarianship as the 21st century profession, to continue the dialog between LIS educators and practitioners, and to recruit, educate, and place students from diverse populations. ALA subsequently established task forces to deal with the major issues identified by the Congress and assigned other recommendations to specific committees and units within the organization. The ALA Executive Board and Council are monitoring implementation. A second Congress on Continuing Education is planned for November 2000. (Contains 28 references.) (Author/MES)

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The congress on professional education in North America

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Abstract

In order to chart a course for the future development of professional librarians, the American Library Association (ALA) sponsored a Congress on Professional Education in 1999 to examine critical issues related to graduate education. Issues centered around university education generally, Library and Information Studies (LIS) education specifically and the perspective of the profession at large. More than 150 invited delegates were named from a wide variety of professional associations and other groups to ensure diversity of experience and commitment to continuing dialogue and change.Recommendations were made to define the scope, content and values of the profession, to establish and apply standards for accreditation of graduate programs, to enable credentialing and continuing education, to position librarianship as the 21st century profession, to continue the dialogue between Library and Information Studies educators and practitioners, and to recruit, educate and place students from diverse populations.

The Association subsequently established task forces to deal with the major issues identified by the Congress and assigned other recommendations to specific committees and units within the organization. ALA Executive Board and Council are carefully monitoring implementation.A second Congress, on Continuing Education, is also planned for November, 2000.

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Paper

Introduction

In 1992 the American Library Association (ALA) established standards for the accreditation of graduate programs of education in Library and Information Studies. These standards apply to approximately 57 degree programs in the United States of America and in Canada. (The Canadian Library Association and the Canadian graduate schools invite and accept American accreditation with Canadian observers.) In the period since 1992, the problems related to the graduate education of professional librarians, whether real of imagined, came to pervade professional and academic discourse and literatures. These were identified by the ALA Council, and others, as the growing elimination of the "L" word [Library] from the names of schools, the seeming lack of attention to core competencies, with cataloguing often mentioned, and the national shortage in North America of professionals to work with particular groups, such as young people and disadvantaged populations in public libraries, and in particular environments, such as schools.

There was also an apparent "disjuncture" between graduate programs of Library and Information Studies and employers in some locations.

Among the related issues initially identified were recruitment, staffing levels, learning to learn by all library workers, continuing education, certification and licensing, and foreign credentialing and equivalency.

In response to these concerns, the ALA Executive Board established a Steering Committee in September, 1998 to plan an "education summit" to examine the initial preparation of professional librarians as a first step in studying the broader issues of education and training for librarians and other library workers.

The steering committee comprised representatives of the ALA Council and Executive Board, the quasi-autonomous ALA Committee on Accreditation; the Association's Committee on Education, the eleven ALA divisions, the Association for Library and Information Science Education, and other national professional associations such as the American Association of Law Librarians, the Association of Research Libraries, the Medical Library Association and the Special Libraries Association. In addition, the Executive Board named members with diverse backgrounds and experiences for 18 members.

The Steering Committee recognized that the issues are complex; that the summit could only be considered a first step in a process of improvement; as it could not in and of itself "fix" anything but assured an open, inclusive and thoughtful process, imposing neither a specific agenda nor a preferred outcome.

Content and Process

In order to prepare for a national discussion and debate about professional education, the Steering Committee formed four working groups, three of which dealt with "content" areas and one with "process" issues. The committees identified issues and commissioned research and background papers to inform deliberations.

Initial issues identified in higher education were

- changes in mission, leadership, and the role of information;
- relationship of the university within society;
- resource allocation and funding;
- external market forces;
- accountability inside and outside the university;
- education vs. training, relationship and standing of professional schools within graduate education;
- accreditation of Library and Information Studies within higher education;
- comparison of Library and Information Studies accreditation standards to other professions

These issues reflect both the internal and external factors affecting higher education; the politics of higher education; the differences among colleges,. schools, departments and programs; the emphasis on scholarship; restructuring; and the demise of the service ideal in some institutions.

Initial issues identified in Library and Information Studies Education (LIS) were

- core competencies and values;
- preparing generalist and specialist practitioners;
- the domain of the curriculum;
- accreditation, including by the American Library Association, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) which works with ALA to accredit programs of education for school librarians, and others;
- access to LIS education, involving issues of geography, specialization and diversity;
- theory and practice; and
- experiential learning.

Initial issues emanating from the profession(s) were

- professional values;
- knowledge and skills;
- appropriate degree(s);
- one profession or a group of related professions;
- traditional roles, new roles, additional roles, different roles, enduring roles;
- continuing education and training;
- alternative careers;
- certification;
- executive training;
- second master's specialization;
- recruitment issues, including salaries, shortages, placement, job security, geographic location;
- diversity of the workforce and demographics; and
- economics, that is, return on investment for graduates and cost effectiveness for institutions/employers.

The list of background papers and related readings for delegates is appended.

Congress on Professional Education

The Congress on Professional Education examined the initial preparation of

profession librarians as a first step in studying broader issues of education and training Delegates:

1. examined the complexity of librarianship within the context of politics within higher education; economic pressures; geographic disparities; education for the many faces of librarianship; and changing demographics in society;
2. reviewed the changing role of accreditation in the LIS profession and in others; the historic conflict between education and training; and the curriculum in "library education";
3. worked to define the library profession today and into the 21st century;
4. identified preliminary core values which shape the library professional;
5. outlined strategies of action for library associations, employers, schools of Library and Information Studies and concerned alumnae.

There was consensus that the Congress focus on shared understanding, consensus and articulation of strategies. The overall goal was to ensure that the health of the profession continues into the future.

While there were commissioned background papers and individual and panel presentations, the process for the Congress emphasized small group interaction using a variety of criteria for different groupings to ensure both diversity of opinion and experience where appropriate and common concerns where appropriate. Trained facilitators were used throughout.

There was great interest in the Congress among individuals and groups. Due to the need not only to be fair, open and inclusive, but also to be perceived as same, the committee concentrated on commitments and representation from

- national associations (e.g., affiliates, specialist associations, divisions, accrediting bodies) and
- groups (e.g., ethnic caucuses, round tables, critical committees)

The committee reviewed the named representatives to assure broadly defined diversity. Additional invitations to specific individuals were thus limited to underrepresented groups (e.g., students, new librarians) and specific expertise (e.g., authors of solicited papers).

In balancing participation at the Congress, the following criteria were applied: type and size of library, ethnic/cultural diversity; geographic diversity; years in the profession; students; age; disabilities; etc.

There were 150 delegates in total, including representatives, presenters, staff and observers. The executive directors of the major partner groups were also included to enable continuing association commitment and understanding of context. Delegates were expected to read the background papers and participate in electronic discussions prior to the Congress, to participate actively and thoughtfully through the Congress and to engage in deliberations and actions to move the Congress consensus forward. The web site is still available and includes the list of delegates and biographical and contact information.

The press were also invited to attend and invited to participate.

The initial presentations provided a framework for deliberations. Ted Marchese (American Association of Higher Education) described the higher education environment today and current trends, including doing more with less in a web-based learning environment while remaining central to the university's

mission. Barbara Moran (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill) reviewed the changes in education for Library and Information Studies as a result of a decade in survival mode; the "schools" now deliver many "programs", including the MLS, while dealing with the tensions of balancing university and employer demands, theory and practice, and librarianship and other information professions. As a major employer, Marilyn Mason (Cleveland, Ohio, Public Library) identified critical shortages, core competencies and limited collaboration as issues for educators and the profession; she proposed subsidized education for key areas, engaging professional librarians primarily as managers and trainers, and higher salaries as three possible alternatives to address these problems.

Delegates identified essential values for the profession; these included intellectual freedom, equitable access, professionalism (the body of knowledge) and quality service and respect (diversity, privacy and confidentiality); these will be realized only when librarians can manage and market well, enable access through teaching and literacy, communicate effectively, be creative and innovative, and comfortable with technology and change in different environments.

Panelists addressed the lack of knowledge about accreditation by practitioners and the lack of rigor in the process as currently practised while educators and practitioners provided viewpoints on the curriculum of Library and Information Studies: graduates need to understand information, the relationship of people to that information, and technology as a tool to connect the two but theories of context, users and communication make the environment, i.e., for profit or not for profit libraries, and the nature of the client, e.g., children, critical factors in curriculum design and delivery.

Delegates identified issues and strategies for addressing the critical issues. Through several meetings, review of minutes and transcripts and electronic consultation the Steering Committee framed these results into recommendations to inform the work of the American Library Association and partner groups in five broad areas, to enable the profession to:

- Define the Scope, Content and Values of the Profession;
- Establish and Apply Standards for Accreditation;
- Enable Credentialing and Continuing Education;
- Position Librarianship as the 21st Century Profession;
- Continue the Dialogue between Library and Information Studies Educators And Practitioners; and
- Recruit, Educate and Place Students from Diverse Populations.

A host of additional "second tier" recommendations has also been prepared for the consideration of those group(s) to which these recommendations are assigned. Work has begun to address each recommendation.

Define the Scope, Content and Values of the Profession

Specifically, the ALA, in consultation with the appropriate partner group(s), must...

clarify the core values (credo) of the profession

- although the ALA has issued a number of documents that imply values for

the profession (e.g., a code of ethics, statement on intellectual freedom; affirmation of libraries as an American value) there is no clear explication to which members can refer and through which decisions can be assessed; the resulting statement should be developed with partner groups or endorsed by them as the values of librarianship to inform education programs [a draft position statement will be debated by ALA Council in July, 2000]

identify the core competencies for the profession

- a clear statement of competencies should be available to educators, practitioners and the public; while there has been concern expressed about lack of attention to particular core competencies, there is a statement of core competencies and of their importance for accreditation in the current [1992] Standards for Accreditation; these need to be affirmed and profiled, or reconsidered and revised; the resulting statement should be available separately as well; it may be necessary to specify both the disciplinary base (e.g., organization of information and knowledge) and its application (e.g., classification, cataloguing)

describe the competencies of the generalist of the future

- it sometimes appears that each specialist association/division/group has defined the essential professional and personal competencies required to be employed, and effective, in their environment; while these statements are useful both for educators for planning education programs and professionals for planning continuing education there needs to be a foundation set for the generalist professional librarian

Establish and Apply Standards for Accreditation

Specifically, the ALA, in consultation with the appropriate partner group(s), must...

explore the possibility of an independent board for Accreditation

- in planning the Congress it was obvious that there is a wide range of national and international associations concerned with the accreditation process funded and managed by the American Library Association; it is critical that discussions be held to explore the feasibility of a collaborative, independent board comprising, and supported by, all the primary players, including ALA and its divisions and partner groups

determine whether ALA is accrediting programs for librarians only or also for other information professionals, including specializations

- the Standards for Accreditation apply to "Library "and Information Studies" yet there is some question as to whether this is [a] "librarianship" under a different name, or [b] librarianship expanding into other areas, or [c] a broader range of information professionals, including, for example, archivists, records managers, researchers, Internet managers and trainers

examine the process for accreditation as applied in other professions to determine and apply "best practices"

- several alternative models, such as from accounting, education, law, medicine, were presented during the Congress, each with considerations for improving the current accreditation process for Library and Information Studies; these should be examined for their possible replication

clarify and strengthen the process for the cyclical review of the Standards for Accreditation

- the profession and its practice is undergoing significant change yet the revision of Standards is viewed as an "event" rather than as an ongoing process; the "new" 1992 Standards were still being applied for the first time to some programs last accredited eight years ago yet revision is necessary to address concerns, experiences and trends; standards must also address collaborative planning, outcomes-based evaluation and pedagogy

clarify and "mainstream" the criteria and management of the ALA/NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education) process for school librarians who choose that route

- the NCATE process, recognized by ALA, should be managed by the ALA Office of Accreditation where the Association's expertise and resources reside rather than by the American Association of School Librarians [this has since been implemented]

promote knowledge and understanding of the accreditation process, specifically that it is outcomes-based and is critical to the profession

- there is a serious lack of understanding of the current Standards and the process for their application that needs to be addressed if there is to be meaningful dialogue between educators and practitioners; promotion of the process should also increase the perceived value of accreditation

strengthen the mechanism(s) which exist for involvement of the profession in the accreditation process

- more professional members need to participate in the accreditation process if it is to become more broadly-based and better understood

strengthen the rigor of the accreditation process including training for site visitors

- the rigor of the application of the Standards is dependent on the quality of the site visitors and their training; the current process provides for an orientation of site visitors rather than training in the Standards and the evidence which is necessary to assess their attainment

ensure that core competencies and Standards are met be each accredited program

- while various components of the Standards are important, even essential, to the quality of a program-e.g., curriculum, faculty, students, administration, resources-the bottom line for consumers is whether the core competencies of the profession are evident in graduates; this needs to be addressed specifically

find ways to provide relevant consumer information about the review of programs to potential students. employers and other stakeholders

- more than one third of programs reviewed now receive fewer than the full term between external on-site reviews yet no information is provided to consumers about the reasons for these decisions as they apply to potential students and employers; improved access to accreditation information for each program is necessary

explore ways to expand access to graduate professional education

- access is impeded in many ways-e.g., lack of opportunities due to geographic remoteness, socio-cultural factors, economic hardship including a lack of scholarships, omission of particular specializations in some areas-and these barriers need to be addressed beyond the single program or region; leadership is necessary to ensure that access is facilitated by programs in concert with other partners

Enable Credentialing and Continuing Education

Specifically, the ALA, in consultation with the appropriate partner group(s), must...

develop a coordinated approach to post-M.L.I.S. certification/credentialing

- while specific divisions of ALA have undertaken credentialing programs, and other specialist groups have done so as well, there is confusion as to the relationship of these credentials to graduate education, conference programs and continuing professional education, and the expectations, if any, of employers

explore establishing a [independent] center for continuing education and professional development

- enormous resources are directed at continuing education, whether national conferences, seminars and workshops, special programs, etc., yet there is no coordinated approach to ensure quality and relevance in programming that will move the profession forward; this might include high quality credentialing programs

focus conference programs as continuing education/professional development opportunities which can be extended through seminars and workshops offered by the Association

- there is a lack of congruence between conference programs and other programs; the priorities for continuing education are unclear; it is also unclear whether best practice or revenue enhancement drive continuing education opportunities

encourage stratification of trained personnel

- the needs and requirements of specific levels of personnel need to be identified and education programs developed accordingly; it is unclear whether employers and educators agree on the need for trained library technicians/technical assistants and whether there is a place for the post-baccalaureate Bachelor of Library and Information Studies as an alternative for those not interested in continuing to the graduate degree;

further study is needed here; demand for stratification and impact on the value of the M.L.I.S. need to be investigated

clarify roles of personnel who work in libraries

- individuals should be assigned work commensurate with their education and experience; similarly, while it is a common lament that the public believes that the circulation clerk is the librarian, there has been no examination of means by which this perception can be changed through, for example, name and position tags

determine how to recognize/acknowledge foreign credentials

- while holders of the ALA-accredited degree expect the value of their credential to be acknowledged in other countries, the same expectation and reciprocity is not currently extended to residents holding foreign equivalent qualifications and wishing to obtain professional positions in North America; models and experiences from related professions should be explored [this has since been implemented through a policy statement approved by ALA Council in January, 2000]

Position Librarianship as the 21st Century Profession

Specifically, the ALA, in consultation with the appropriate partner group(s), must...

market librarianship as the 21st century profession

- the Association has done a remarkably good job of promoting local libraries to the extent that the public supports their libraries, they are just not convinced that professional librarians are necessary to manage them; the Association has supported these efforts through advertising, promotion, public relations, merchandising, lobbying, advocacy training, etc. and needs to apply these same strategies to promoting the profession itself in all types of libraries and institutions [this has since been commenced with a professional marketing firm]

address the need to improve salaries

- salaries are an issue in some locations, in some environments, in some specialty positions; some salaries are controlled by the institution and its [librarian] management, others by municipal managers and corporate executives; the salary issue needs to be researched, examined and a strategy developed to improve remuneration; loan forgiveness programs, incentives for work in areas of need, and partnerships need to be considered

develop a problem-based research agenda for the profession for the next five years

- the Association has many mechanisms and fora to enable identification and articulation of the most pressing research needs of the profession

fund research important to the profession

- available research funding should be targeted to the critical research areas

identified; research grants might be configured as calls for proposals around topical and practice-based questions for investigation

disseminate (in appropriate ways) the findings and conclusions from research and their implications for professional practice

- more prominent and creative ways need to be found for disseminating research to the field in a way that makes it meaningful and useful, and a catalyst to improved practice

Continue the Dialogue between Library and Information Studies Educators And Practitioners

Specifically, the ALA, in consultation with the appropriate partner group(s), must...

create a structure for continuing dialogue between Library and Information Studies educators and practitioners to continue the work began at this Congress

- an annual event designed to raise issues and provide for their resolution should be organized, in conjunction with one or more of the partner groups, for mid-winter or annual meetings; it might be noted that the Congress was successful in part due to its representative structure, common background information and skilled facilitation [this has since been implemented]

create partnerships between Library and Information Studies educators and alumni and between educators and employers

- this should be encouraged through outcomes specified in the Standards; examples might include collaborative planning, collaborative research and team teaching

foster partnerships between graduate programs and alumni to engage alumni in mentoring and sharing expertise, donating time as well as money

- this should be promoted through the activities of the Associations

develop mechanism(s) to provide mentoring throughout one's career (including pre-graduate degree)

- mentorships are undertaken at the local, state, national and international levels and require guidance and support; an outline of best practices and current programs would be useful to extend successful models

encourage a coordinated approach to methods for learning in Library and Information Studies and provide training for educators in, for example, evidence-based learning, problem-based learning, authentic and portfolio assessments

- when comparing Library and Information Studies to other programs in higher education, commentators found our programs to be lacking in a coordinated approach and more current methods in graduate professional programs; our innovations were more geared to making lectures and discussion more accessible over greater distance electronically

develop strategies to address shortages in the field

- shortages and impending shortages need to be identified with evidence and made known to educators and leaders in the field; clear responsibility and mechanisms for addressing these shortages need to be developed; creative responses will be necessary, such as coordinated approaches to specializations among schools, summer-based and cohort programs for teachers for school library media, etc.

create a document that identifies responsibilities of educators and responsibilities of employers

- while employers are not responsible for poor admissions decisions made by schools, neither are schools responsible for poor personnel decisions made by employers; there needs to be a clear specification of mutual roles and responsibilities of graduate programs, faculty and students, and employers and employees and their interrelatedness

authorize the preparation and publication of the papers and proceedings of the Congress on Professional Education

- the background papers, panel presentations, identified values and competencies, summaries of issues and responses, are all important material for ongoing discussion and dialogue among and between educators, associations, employers, students and other stakeholders

convene a meeting of the partner associations, represented by their presidents and executive directors, to discuss how to move forward with these recommendations and the conversations begun around graduate professional education

- regular monitoring and adjusting of these recommendations will be necessary with partner groups and progress based on collaborative planning, implementation and assessment

Recruit, Educate and Place Students from Diverse Populations

Specifically, the ALA, in consultation with the appropriate partner group(s), must...

address diversity considerations-multilingual, multiethnic, multicultural-in order to recruit, educate and place students from diverse populations as professional librarians to ensure programs and services and support for special needs and the underserved

- this particular recommendation appears throughout the suggested strategies as it needs to be made visible and pervasive in the profession and its institutions

The Committee's final report synthesized ideas, suggestions and strategies to reflect the Congress consensus, and developed recommendations for the ALA Executive Board. This was the final task of the Steering Committee.

The Congress on Professional Education fulfilled its mandate to facilitate an

open, inclusive and thoughtful process without a specific agenda or preferred outcome; the issues are indeed complex, both in and of themselves and for the perspectives and passions which surround them; and, again, the summit can only be considered a first step in a process of improvement; it could not in and of itself "fix" anything. The recommendations do enable the stakeholders in graduate professional education to forge alliances, build on mutual understanding and improve the quality and diversity of professionals providing excellent service to our customers and clientele.

Careful monitoring, including regular reports to the ALA Executive Board of progress, has begun. With the implementation of these recommendations, the graduate programs of education will be more clearly defined, more carefully structured, and more closely monitored with increased liaison with the profession and the university. Employers such as university and research libraries will be better able to identify the core competencies and values developed in graduates and the strengths and limitations of each program.

As professional education is but the first step in a career, the American Library Association will sponsor a second Congress, using the same process model as the first, but focused on continuing education for all library workers.

Careful planning, involved and credible association and institutional representatives and an open inclusive process, can lead to the identification of critical issues in the profession and the development of strategies to address the identified problems and perceptions. Progress results through this commitment to continual improvement based on evidence and involvement.

Selected Background Papers and Readings

unless otherwise indicated the original papers listed here are available through the Congress web site http://www.ala.org/congress where the necessary URLs and links are also available

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Links to Selected Educational Policy Statements

these are available through the Congress web site http://www.ala.org/congress where the necessary URLs and links are also available

American Society for Information Science
Association for Library Collections and Technical Services
Association for Library Services to Children
Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada/Canadian School Library Association
Association of College and Research Libraries
Medical Library Association
Society of American Archivists
Special Libraries Association
Young Adult Library Services Association

Associations and groups represented at the Congress on Professional Education

included the American Association of Law Libraries; American Association of School Librarians; American Indian Library Association; ALA Armed Forces

Libraries Round Table; ALA Chapter Relations Committee; ALA Committee on Accreditation; ALA Committee on Education; ALA Committee on Minority Concerns and Cultural Diversity; ALA Congress on Professional Education Steering Committee; ALA Continuing Library Education Network and Exchange Round Table; ALA Ethnic Materials and Information Exchange Round Table; ALA Executive Board; ALA Federal Librarians Round Table; ALA Government Documents Round Table; ALA Intellectual Freedom Round Table; ALA New Members Round Table; ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table; American Association for Higher Education; American Society for Information Science; Asian/Pacific American Librarians' Association; Association for Library and Information Science Education; Association for Library Collections and Technical Services; Association for Library Services to Children; Association of College and Research Libraries; Association of Library Trustees and Advocates; Association of Research Libraries; Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies; Black Caucus of ALA; Canadian Library Association; Chief Officers of State Library Agencies; Chinese-American Librarians Association; Council of Canadian Library Schools; Library Administration and Management Association; Library and Information Technology Association; Medical Library Association; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; National Commission for Library and Information Science; National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education; Public Library Association; REFORMA (National Association to Promote Library Services to the Spanish Speaking); Reference and User Services Association; Special Libraries Association; and the Young Adult Library Services Association.

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